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CASE STUDY

We Bring Our Minds Together as One: Nesting a Day of Native Studies Public Humanities Programming within a Larger Network of Collaboration

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Abstract

How can a single-day cluster of public learning activities contribute to a larger ongoing public humanities agenda? This essay's co-authors—facilitators of a public lecture and associated activities sponsored by a university academic department—revisit their strategic efforts to provide leadership for the one-day series of interconnected events, anchored in a Native scholar's public lecture on sovereignty and citizenship. We write from a predominantly white university geographically removed from Native nations' reservations and lacking a full-fledged curriculum in Indigenous studies. Yet we also write as members of a consortium committed to enhancing reciprocal learning with Indigenous peoples. Thus, we aimed to set this one-day program within our local collaborative's sustained work to develop curriculum; engage multiple audiences in topics important to Native studies; and foster networks linking students, faculty, and staff with Native community members. In making visible aspects of "doing" public humanities that often remain unrecorded, this case study will assist others interested in taking on public humanities work, whether a small-scale, single-day program or initiatives extended across a long-term calendar. After describing the ongoing work, one university and Native community partners have been carrying out through a Native and Indigenous Peoples Initiative, and situating those efforts in connection with our collaborative's shared values for community building, the essay revisits event management steps taken to tap into and support that endeavor. Acknowledging successful elements alongside challenges and opportunities not fully achieved, our case study also offers approaches for collaborative evaluation of public humanities programming.

Keywords: community engagement; Indigenous public humanities; Native studies programming; public humanities; reciprocal learning

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We bring our minds as together as one.
We thank the Animals that they shall still serve their purpose.
They give us help for many reasons.
So that's how our minds will be.

The above is a small selection from an Onʌyoteʔa·ká (Oneida) version of the Kanehelat&ksla, a name that is often translated as the Thanksgiving address but would more literally be translated as "what's used to give greetings, thanks, and love." The address is shared across the six nations of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy. Tom Porter, a leader and activist, translates the Kanien'kehá:ka (Mohawk) name for the address (Oh#nton Kariwat#hkwen) as "what we say before we do anything important."[1] Between these two translations, we can understand both what the address does and when it is used. The Thanksgiving address asks listeners to bring their minds together in a spirit of respect and gratefulness. The speaker thanks specific parts of creation in turn, identifying them and acknowledging the role they play in supporting our shared journey in this place. After each element is named and thanked, the listeners collectively respond with an affirmation, confirming that we are, in fact, together as one in our respect. The address is spoken before any important community gathering, whether it is a ceremony, a general tribal council meeting, or a keynote address. Porter calls the address a skeleton key, because contained within it is the worldview and creation story of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy.[2] When we recite the address, we remind ourselves to center our values, to respect each other, and to recognize the role that diverse elements have to play in supporting our community. In this essay about public humanities work involving both Native people and allies, a piece of writing that discusses reciprocity and community engagement, it feels right to begin in this way.[3]

We write as a collective whose members have been involved in public humanities activities and related endeavors aimed at strengthening ties between our university, Texas Christian University (TCU) in Fort Worth, Texas, and Native communities in our region and beyond. We have been encouraged by progress in recent years, though we know much remains to be done if emerging partnerships are to become more sustained and reciprocal. The case study we present here situates the envisioning, delivery, and assessment of a single day's programming within this larger context of ever-unfolding efforts as an example of how a single day's events—when nested within a larger ongoing effort at developing meaningful collaborations—can help build institutional capacity for a larger goal and affirm values guiding this work, while also providing an opportunity for evaluating progress, identifying areas for improvement, and refining strategies.

A framework for action based on shared values has been guiding all our work, which includes participation from other faculty and staff beyond this essay's co-authors, as well as students and Native community members. Writing and revision of this text—similar to planning, carrying out, and evaluating the one-day program revisited here—provided an important

[1] Porter 2008, 8.
[2] Porter 2008, 8.
[3] We join the compelling call Mendoza-Mori 2025 issued within a cluster of essays for *PMLA* on public humanities and the larger culture of academics to "not simply acknowledge the existence of Indigenous knowledge systems but [to] make space for learning in a different way, for different cosmovisions." We, too, affirm that "integrating Indigenous languages and cultures into higher education," can help "advance the humanities, empower diverse students and scholars, and develop meaningful educational and community partnerships" (160).

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opportunity for us to surface and articulate those shared values. Conversations among the co-authors and other colleagues in our collective now weave into this text, responding to questions posed to us by the generous reviewers of our initial journal submission. In particular, one reviewer invited us to characterize the relationship we see between public humanities endeavors and Native Studies, and how fostering connections between the two might include acknowledging ways that Native communities have long been carrying out important work, consistent with public humanities aims without needing to use the label. As we co-authors each read this question, and conferred with other colleagues involved in our TCU-linked situational context, Shawn Wilson's *Research Is Ceremony* emerged as a text that articulates values driving what we do, including the events described here.[4] In fact, we discovered that several of us had been drawing on Wilson's book in different individual publications for years.[5] Talking through what appeals to us about Wilson's framework enabled us to produce a distillation of approaches he affirms that we also seek to employ, and thus to describe what we see as central to an Indigenous public humanities.

Describing his own research approach, Wilson (Opaskwayak Cree Nation, from northern Canada) emphasizes both relationality and relational accountability. In casting research done by and for Indigenous communities as a ceremony, Wilson affirms an ethical commitment to reciprocal listening, to reflections on (and with) the communities and places we come from and where we do our work, and to embracing shared inquiry as a pathway that can strengthen relationships—by recognizing research activity itself as a kind of ceremony. Through collaborative reflections on how Wilson's model aligns with community-building efforts within our campus-based collective and with Native communities in our region, we can now offer an extension of his conceptual framework: we think Indigenous public humanities, carried out with attention to values like reciprocity and practices like careful listening, can also be a ceremony. Assuming so, then it behooves us also to attend closely to all the elements within even a single event—like the hosting of a visiting scholar that we revisit here—as bringing together potentially meaningful features helping affirm shared values. That is, Indigenous public humanities calls upon and fosters the kinds of relational, contextually situated, and reciprocally accountable collaborative knowledge-making that Wilson envisions. With this in mind, in the sections that follow, we revisit both the broader context and specific steps involved in a one-day program at TCU wherein we sought to enact an *Indigenous public humanities as a collaborative ceremony* through specific elements in planning, holding, and evaluating the event. Clearly, not every aspect of the program lived up to our aspirations, but we continue learning from this experience in ways contributing to our ongoing goals.

Specific occasion, multiple contexts

Along with the conceptual framework and value system referenced above, three interconnected contexts helped shape the program we revisit here as a case study: a notable

[4] Wilson 2008; see especially the introductory "Foreword and Conclusion."

[5] See, for instance, Gomez 2024, where Gomez (one of our consortium members) invokes Wilson's model to argue that "a move toward engaged scholarship is a move toward understanding the ways in which [a] Scholar and the community the scholar works with are embedded in relationship as well as the importance of ongoing self-reflection on one's place in community" (484). See also the introduction to Robbins 2017, where co-author Robbins describes Wilson's model as contributing to her collaborations with staff from the National Museum of the American Indian and her studies of Native teachers (and some white educators) who resisted boarding schools' assimilationist practices.

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anniversary in Native American history; trends in the public humanities calling for ethical programming and assessment honoring all stakeholders; and the ongoing work, itself, of seeking to build community for Native Studies and community engagement at our institution.

In 2024, the anniversary of the Indian Citizenship Act's passage in 1924 presented a noteworthy opportunity for public humanities programming, especially since that year's historical milestone coincided with a highly anticipated U.S. national election. The 2024 moment would, we co-authors recognized, present possibilities for engaging audiences in questions about sovereignty, citizenship, and belonging—as well as modes of resistance against assaults on such rights. Although we understand that sovereignty itself is a highly vexed category with a complicated history tied to imperialism, we also viewed the topic as important to engage, particularly at our predominantly white institution whose students often have limited knowledge of its history, in the United States or globally.[6] Thus, the 2024 "anniversary" context inspired our efforts to bring to campus a Native Studies scholar whose research, teaching, and personal experiences would foster engagement with such questions. We found an ideal interlocutor in Dr. Jill Doerfler of the University of Minnesota, Duluth. As we will outline in more detail below, we anticipated that introducing our audiences to Doerfler's scholarship and activism with her own tribal community would enable those attending to see how, consistent with Manuela Picq's analysis, plural versions of "Indigenous sovereignties are practiced in vernacular contexts, thus transforming a singular form of authority into a plurality of forms adaptable to contextual realities."[7]

Doerfler's campus visit took shape, as well, in the context of increasing commitments throughout academe transnationally to public humanities as a vital scholarly enterprise.[8] More specifically, we co-authors, the facilitators of the multi-event visit, also drew on research addressing approaches for envisioning public humanities initiatives through an ethical framework and assessing such efforts via diverse methodologies enhancing knowledge-making about such work.[9] For example, our planning benefited from a 2022 study by the Modern Language Association, *Guidelines for Evaluating Publicly Engaged Humanities Scholarship in Language and Literature Programs*, which emphasizes ethical collaboration, impact on stakeholder communities, effective dissemination, and "lay [ing] the groundwork for future development."[10] Reflecting retrospectively, we also align our efforts with recognition of the long history Roopika Risam chronicles in *Public Humanities* of how "many people of color and Indigenous people who gained access to humanities knowledge in and beyond colleges and universities [have long] used their skills to create opportunities for their communities," thereby simultaneously asserting their human leadership of humanities endeavors.[11] In that regard, beyond anchoring our 2024 event in a theme linked to a 1924 milestone in Native history, we also hoped Doerfler's modeling of activist citizenship would lay groundwork for our audiences' further engagement with other Indigenous women's progressive activism across time—such as leaders like Gertrude Bonnin (Zitkala-Ša), Ora Eddleman Reed, and the Kichwa women activists honored in Picq's *Vulnerable Sovereignties.*[12]

[6] Picq 2018 importantly reminds us that "Native scholars are split on whether to reject sovereignty as a category unrelated to Indigenous governance or adopt it to make autonomy claims intelligible to state institutions" (19).

[7] Picq 2018, 20.

[8] Message, Bongiorno, and Wellington 2024; Lewis 2024.

[9] Lewis 2024; Kornstein and Barrios 2025.

[10] MLA Ad Hoc Committee on Valuing the Public Humanities 2022.

[11] Risam 2025, 2–3.

[12] On Bonnin, see especially Hafen 2022; on Reed, see Carpenter and Kilcup 2024. See also Picq 2018.

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Another guiding context for our program was our university's ongoing work to build significant affirmation of Indigenous communities in our region and beyond, of Native knowledge, and of partnerships linking the university and Native groups. We appreciate that these ongoing efforts are far from unique and that our efforts represent just one small piece of larger, long-standing interventions seeking to "Indigenize" university culture through various pathways, including partnerships involving Native scholars, allies in the academy, and Indigenous community members.[13] Still, we are glad that, over the past decade, TCU, a private institution with a Protestant religious heritage, has made gradual but steady progress in developing collaborative connections and enacting commitment to Native Studies and Native communities. This work evolved in multiple nodes of action—such as the launch of a student interest group, new scholarships for enrolled citizens of Native tribes, gradual creation of new courses and course modules, and outreach by a dedicated few faculty and staff members supporting partnerships with Native-led initiatives. Over time, too, TCU has been hiring more faculty who are themselves members of Native communities and/or have substantial preparation for teaching Native studies responsibly. One growing group of faculty has been in the English Department, where most of this essay's co-authors hold appointments. Thus, when the opportunity arose for the department's annual lecture in American literature and culture to host a Native speaker, we sought to construct a public humanities event that would tap into the energy our institution had been giving to this community building.

Our work for this particular event—as for the larger agenda helping inform it—has benefited from Native, community-based knowledge of team members Wendi Sierra (Oneida Nation of Wisconsin) and Jacqui Razo-Haynes (Jumano Nation; Apache Shi kéé), along with the research profile of faculty member Yingwen Yu, who studies and teaches in both Native American and global Indigenous cultures.[14] Yu, for instance, identified Doerfler as an ideal speaker on the sovereignty theme we were focusing on for numerous 2024 events; relatedly, Yu was planning an undergraduate seminar for which that topic would be central. To create this report, we are also taking advantage of the English Department's providing funds for research assistance by the essay's first author, graduate student Gunja Nandi. We also draw on the prior experience that another of our department co-authors, Sarah Ruffing Robbins, brings to facilitating collaborative public humanities programming.[15] In making visible aspects of "doing" collaborative public humanities that often remain unrecorded, we

[13] See, for example, Alfred's 2004 and Clark's 2004 contributions to Mihesuah and Wilson 2004. For a compelling example of sustained commitment "grounded in a relationship defined by *neepwaantiinki*, which means learning from each other or partners in learning" (169), see the chapter by Baldwin et al. 2022 in Barnes and Warren 2022. We also affirm Shriver's (2022) reflections on thoughtful allyship in another of that collection's chapters, including Shriver's suggestion that "community-engaged scholarship" (which can be a close relative to partnership-oriented Indigenous public humanities) "involves collaboration, a sharing of agency" (154) and that meaningful "engagement takes time" (155).

[14] Sierra is housed in the Honors College but holds a doctorate in Communication, Rhetoric, and Digital Media, and frequently collaborates with colleagues in English, such as serving on a recent English Department faculty search committee. In the winter of 2025, our colleague Jacqui Razo-Haynes began a new position as a Master Trainer and Program Specialist for a Tribal Consulting firm. Though her move represents a huge loss for our department and TCU, her new position enables her to do work directly assisting tribal communities with technical training assistance and community development. Razo-Haynes now assists tribal communities with activities ranging from federal grant writing to business plan development, research study planning, and community wellness; she loves taking her expertise in teaching and sharing it with her people.

[15] See, for example, the website for a recent public humanities project she co-directed, "The Genius of Phillis Wheatley Peters": https://wheatleypetersproject.weebly.com/ (Robbins et al. 2023). One previous project in Georgia included work with Indigenous scholars, creatives, and other community members to study the Cherokee Removal.

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hope to assist others interested in taking on similar projects, whether a small-scale, single-day program or initiatives across a long-term calendar.

Links with pre-developed community connections

TCU's ongoing Native American and Indigenous Peoples Initiative (NAIPI) has been multi-faceted, tapping into a broad pool of leadership. Several campus-wide activities demonstrate TCU's evolving reciprocal relationship with both the Dallas-Fort Worth Indigenous community and the nations whose homeland our campus occupies: our Indigenous Peoples Day Symposium, our Native American Advisory Circle, and our Land Acknowledgement and Monument.

The most long-standing event in our NAIPI portfolio is our Indigenous Peoples Day Symposium. Scott Langston (recently retired from the Religion Department) and Theresa Stroth Gaul (now director of the core curriculum) were active leaders in the initial iterations of Native American and Indigenous Peoples Day, held annually in October around the time of the federal Columbus Day holiday. Collaborative planning for this annual symposium has purposefully included Native leadership from around the region and is done intentionally to balance what our campus community *needs* to know and what the local community *wants* to know or share. One such topic was in 2021 when our theme focused on the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women (MMIW) crisis and incorporated both a local activist as a keynote speaker and class visits and workshops by Native women leaders who are engaged in MMIW advocacy.[16] Relatedly, several student groups that year were immersed in the sustained course-linked study of MMIW, with one Gender and Women Studies course producing projects aimed at informing non-Native communities about the topic and subsequently sharing sample projects on a website.[17] As we move into our ninth year of symposium planning, we are mindful of the literacy (or lack thereof) about Native American culture that our students bring to this programming, so we seek to both uplift Indigenous voices and expand how our students consider Native American presence and culture.

An outgrowth of the collaborative and community-engaged work of the symposium has been the formation of a Native American Advisory Circle formally established in 2020.[18] This group includes a mix of tribal leaders, campus community members, and organizers in the Dallas/Fort Worth area. As a collective, this group helps our NAIPI walk a careful balance of both serving our campus audience and being mindful of the needs, concerns, and interests of communities outside campus. An associated achievement was the creation of a monument, in a high-traffic area of campus, to mark the relationship between where the university now stands and its history of belonging to the Wichita and Affiliated Tribes (Figure 1).

[16] Also sometimes referred to as MMIWG2S to additionally identify girls and two-spirit relatives or as MMIP to call out how this crisis impacts all Indigenous people. Our local activist organization is named MMIW Texas Rematriate, and so we honored them in our theme name.

[17] See graduate student Saffyre Falkenberg's gathering of projects on MMIW from that year's Feminist and Queer Inquiry course: https://mmiwhistories-wgst50103.weebly.com/.

[18] See "Leadership and Advisory Circle." https://www.tcu.edu/native-american-indigenous-peoples/about/leadership-advisory-circle.php.

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Figure 1. Native American and Indigenous Peoples Monument at TCU.
Photo Credit: TCU Native American Monument webpage: https://www.tcu.edu/native-american-indigenous-peoples/about/monument.php#:~:text=The monument consists of a,land, for all our relations.

The monument's creation has a collaborative history in line with the larger vision of the NAIPI. Supported through discussion with Wichita regional community members beginning in 2016, the monument's collaborative planning approach was formally approved by the Wichita and Affiliated Tribes' Executive Committee in 2017. The creation of this monument ultimately kickstarted formal work on our official land acknowledgment, which was drafted by the Native American Advisory Circle. The text this group generated was ultimately accepted with no changes by the institution, demonstrating the respect and value our university leaders have placed on making space for Native American voices. In line with the creation of the physical monument, TCU has placed increased emphasis on the meaningful incorporation of land acknowledgments into university-sponsored public programs.[19]

On-campus learning has benefited from the NAIPI initiative, but university-based leaders supporting this commitment understand that to have an ethical and long-term impact, it needs to draw on Native expertise from beyond campus and foster reciprocal partnerships.[20]

[19] TCU's website provides copies of the short- and long-form statement: https://www.tcu.edu/native-american-indigenous-peoples/about/native-american-land-acknowledgment.php. See also "Land Acknowledgement Teaching Guide": https://www.tcu.edu/native-american-indigenous-peoples/files/Teaching-with-TCU-Land-Acknowledgment-and-NA-Monument.pdf. See too our faculty colleague Montes's introduction of himself as "descendant of the Chichimeca Guamares and P'urépecha people from the valley of Huatzindeo" as part of his modeling of "Introduction as Protocol" in a workshop on land acknowledgements for TCU's center for instruction, innovation, and engagement: https://cte.tcu.edu/services/insights-magazine/insights-magazine-2023-spring-issue/teaching-with-tcus-land-acknowledgment-and-native-american-monument/. Extending beyond campus, Montes and Sierra also facilitated a Land Acknowledgement workshop in fall 2023 for several local community institutions, including the Modern Museum of Art, the Fort Worth Botanical Gardens, and the Dallas Museum of Art. Sierra also provides information on the topic (including the history of its development) for new faculty orientations.

[20] Gokey and Sierra 2023. For efforts at TCU, see Langston, Gaul, and Anderson 2025.

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As one example, in the spring of 2024, a group of students and faculty provided logistical support for the Indigenous Institute of the America's powwow. As a member of the Advisory Circle who is also a driving force behind that regular powwow, Annette Anderson (Chickasaw and Cherokee) offered several "Powwow 101" workshops for students, faculty, and staff ahead of that off-campus activity. These workshops served a twofold purpose. First, they helped ensure that participants from the university would arrive with knowledge of etiquette and appreciation of expected cultural practices. However, we also felt it essential that university participants feel welcomed and invited into this space as full participants. Many aspiring participants had little to no experience with Native American culture and prior to the workshops expressed concern that powwows were private events. Thus, the workshop provided an avenue to respond to this (incorrect) perception and to ensure that all participants would enter the event respectfully and comfortably.

Building curriculum, cultivating faculty engagement

Alongside and complementing the University's growing connections with Native communities, faculty at TCU have been bolstering Native Studies curricular content. Increasingly individual courses have included Native Studies modules, as in an English graduate seminar led by Gaul, whose students created an "alternative" campus tour that visits different locations with ties to Native history and culture. More notably, a number of new faculty whose own identities and/or formal academic preparation give them added capacities for curricular leadership have been recruited to the institution. Pablo Montes in Curriculum Studies, Abel Gomez in Religion, and Sierra in the Honors College brought new energy and expertise for infusing Native Studies content across the curriculum.[21] In the English Department, Yu has taught a range of themed writing classes, including those focusing on Native storytelling and identity, as well as Indigenous foodways. Her "Global Women's Literature" course highlights Indigenous women writers transnationally. Her research seminars have explored Indigenous Horror Stories and Indigenous Futurisms.

In her role as Native American Nations and Communities Liaison, co-author Sierra inaugurated multiple approaches for fostering solidarity among faculty who teach Native Studies —whether via whole-course emphasis or in cross-disciplinary modules—while also providing opportunities for community-building. Now dubbed the "Four Directions" group, this network has enjoyed book-club-like readings, beading get-togethers, informal social gatherings, and an email listserv for sharing news of events on campus and beyond, as well as coordinating programming such as the visiting lecture by Doerfler.

Structuring a one-day program to be bigger than a day

The narrative account below reflects on our planning, delivery, and evaluation of this programming, as well as what this public humanities event taught us about how future ones can support TCU's ongoing efforts in Native studies and community-building with local Native groups. While a one-day cluster of events could be viewed as having very limited impact, our experience hosting Doerfler showed that, through collaborative planning that

[21] While revising this essay, we learned that our colleague Gomez is moving to California, to a faculty position in Native studies, returning to live in the region where his work with California tribal organizations can better continue than in Texas. Although this loss to our cohort points to the ongoing challenge of retaining faculty to do our shared work, we look forward to continued collaborations with Abel.

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nests a single program within ongoing activity networks involving sustained partnerships, such an initiative can strengthen that longer-term work. Like much public humanities programming, our work encountered challenges and fell short of our (admittedly idealized) expectations. Yet, even in the step of evaluating through a mixed methodology of assessment, we have brought additional strength to our still-growing partnerships. To support this argument, we provide reflections on our preplanning's purposeful strategies, describe the event activities as set within the framework of larger programming goals, and share our methods of assessment and related takeaways. Our reflections on this single day of programming thus follow a linear organization. We realize our relatively comprehensive recounting of steps involved in its staging runs the risk of marginalizing our bigger picture. However, we include many specifics of our decision-making in order to encourage others working in institutional contexts where large-scale success is challenging to achieve so that it can be easy to lose sight of the significance of small-scale activities. In other words, a "day" of Indigenous-oriented public humanities programming need not be mere tokenism; it can be a meaningful element in a more comprehensive picture. Also, we propose that sustained commitment to building collaborations along with Native community members should recognize the importance of attention to detail—to the symbolic weight of specific enactments that are at the heart of community activities, however "advanced" institutional structures and resources may become over time. In other words, echoing our view outlined above of Indigenous public humanities as shared ceremony-making, we ask readers to see the need for attentive, responsive planning of each piece in a day's activities.

Planning a one-day event to build on related activities

The decision to invite Doerfler for the English Department's 2024–25 Williams Lecture (a donor-funded annual event) emerged from conversations among the faculty group referenced above, which was simultaneously making plans for the university-wide October Native American and Indigenous Peoples Day to adopt "Sovereignty" as its theme. To prepare for the fall symposium, in spring 2024, Sierra arranged a set of "Sovereignty 101" presentations by Josuha Arce (Prairie Band Potawatomi Nation) to introduce students and faculty to this concept and its complex heritage, both within Native nations and amid perennially challenging relations with U.S. imperialism. Then, in early October, the symposium itself incorporated lectures and workshops led by multiple Native community members, including a session on linguistic sovereignty with in-person and Zoom presenters working in a range of Native languages, a talk on the Indian Child Welfare Act of 1978 and its 2023 reaffirmation by the U.S. Supreme Court, a workshop on sovereignty and recognition among Native communities across the university's region, and a lecture by Tehassi Hill, Chairman of the Oneida Nation of Wisconsin, on legal sovereignty as a crucial concept among the 500+ Native nations located with the United States.

With this rich prior programming in mind, our team envisioned the fall English Department-sponsored scholar visit as a follow-up extending learning opportunities that had begun in spring 2024 while contributing to momentum for further curricular efforts and collaborations with Native groups in our region. We chose Doerfler for our invitee based on her long-term expertise as both a scholar-teacher studying blood quantum—a key element in tribal sovereignty—and her previous writing and speaking on the topic for multiple Native and non-Native audiences.[22] We spent time working closely with her ahead of the visit to provide information on our local departmental and university context, as outlined above, and

[22] Doerfler 2007, 2024.

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hearing from her about activities she had found most effective for sharing her work in the past.[23] Once we had planned the schedule of activities during the summer, team members constructed their syllabi with the goal of capitalizing on students' opportunities to learn from Doerfler's visit in ways that would complement their various learning goals, all incorporating the sovereignty theme but for different courses. Robbins's graduate class, for instance, was studying sovereignty and citizenship in a comparative context that set texts and issues from Native studies in dialogue with the history of African American Civil rights, women's bodily sovereignty, and similar topics. Another course for undergraduate English majors, taught by Yu, was focusing on Indigenous sovereignty in a global comparative context but making specific use of scholarship by Doerfler with Gerald Vizenor. Razo-Haynes's course, pitched to underclassmen, was an introduction to Native literature and culture that included such topics/texts as Oral Traditions, Indigenous Music and Art, Food Sovereignty, Broken Treaties, and Native American and Indigenous Representation and Appropriation in Film. That class focused on diverse literature of Native America and the decolonization of Indigenous narratives by Indigenous writers beginning with Daniel Heath Justice's *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter*, followed by documentaries such as *Reel Injun* and *It's a Good Day to Die*, before rounding out the conclusion of the semester with Sonia Paoloni and Christian Sabler's graphic novel *Redbone: The True Story of a Native American Rock Band.*[24]

At the same time, we realized that only some audience members arriving at any event with Doerfler would bring prior knowledge to their participation—such as through previous attendance of the symposium earlier in the fall or through enrollment in one of our classes. Therefore, especially when encouraging other faculty colleagues to help us build attendance, we offered support materials for teaching (see the Supplementary Material). Also, during preplanning with Doerfler, we provided information on each of the different smaller groups with whom she would be meeting and emphasized that, for the public lecture, content should assume no prior knowledge.

Logistics as public humanities opportunities to affirm ceremony

We took time to plan each element in the Doerfler event to align it with the principles of the MLA Guidelines referenced above, as well as our local goals for enhancing the visibility and impact of Native Studies at TCU and for building reciprocal relations with Native communities. That is, logistical choices like reserving the alumni center for all the events (one of the few spaces on our campus with easy, free public parking) were both pragmatic and strategic, even in some cases symbolic (such as thinking about how best to set up seating at a meal including Native community members). In that vein, we arranged for Doerfler to arrive the afternoon ahead of her lecture day, so that she could dine with a group of faculty leaders and graduate students, giving her a chance to strengthen interpersonal connections while providing advice on program-building. At the heart of the schedule, we placed the major public lecture in the middle of the next day, taking into account input from members of the Native Advisory Circle, who had indicated that driving across our large urban metroplex during either morning or evening rush hour discourages attendance at on-campus events. We planned a luncheon in the slot just ahead of the lecture, inviting Native partners in the region, as well as key faculty and leaders from the Native student interest group (Figure 2).

[23] We recommend factoring such pre-visit consultations into agreeing upon an equitable honorarium; we thank Doerfler for her generous willingness to hold such planning conversations as part of her overall work.

[24] Diamond 2009; Salt and Mueller 2010.

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Figure 2. Lunch conversation: English Department chair, Doerfler, and Native community guests.
Photo credit: Glen E. Ellman, photographer, October 29, 2024.

We situated the lecture itself on a day of the week and at a time when we knew our English Department's largest class of students studying Native culture would be able to attend during their regular meeting time, thereby ensuring a core audience of almost 50 students. We augmented that audience with extensive advertising and outreach. Using the 4 Directions faculty-staff group's email listserv, which Sierra had established, we were able to alert faculty involved in Native Studies during the summer, well ahead of Doerfler's visit.

To promote the event beyond that high-interest cadre of instructors, we created digital posters to distribute widely, including to Student Affairs staff in co-curricular programs whose participants might be interested. We emailed copies of the digital flyer to all members of the Native Advisory Circle, along with an invitation to the luncheon. During the Native American and Indigenous Peoples Day earlier in October, we circulated paper copies of our digital flyer among audience members. One particularly generative connection emerged when a member of the Alabama-Coushatta Nation, upon receiving that flyer from a team member at the symposium, reached out to us to inquire if members of their citizenship study group, then in the midst of considering alternatives to blood quantum as a citizenship-determining factor, could join our Doerfler event. Inviting them to the luncheon as well as the lecture, we were able to support their consultation conversations with Doerfler on a topic of vital importance to their tribe (Figure 3).

Meanwhile, the head of the Native student organization—who is planning to attend law school and focus on such issues as blood quantum in his eventual practice—was reaching out to his own networks to encourage attendance. We utilized this multi-pronged advertising blitz with variations for different audiences—such as providing details about parking

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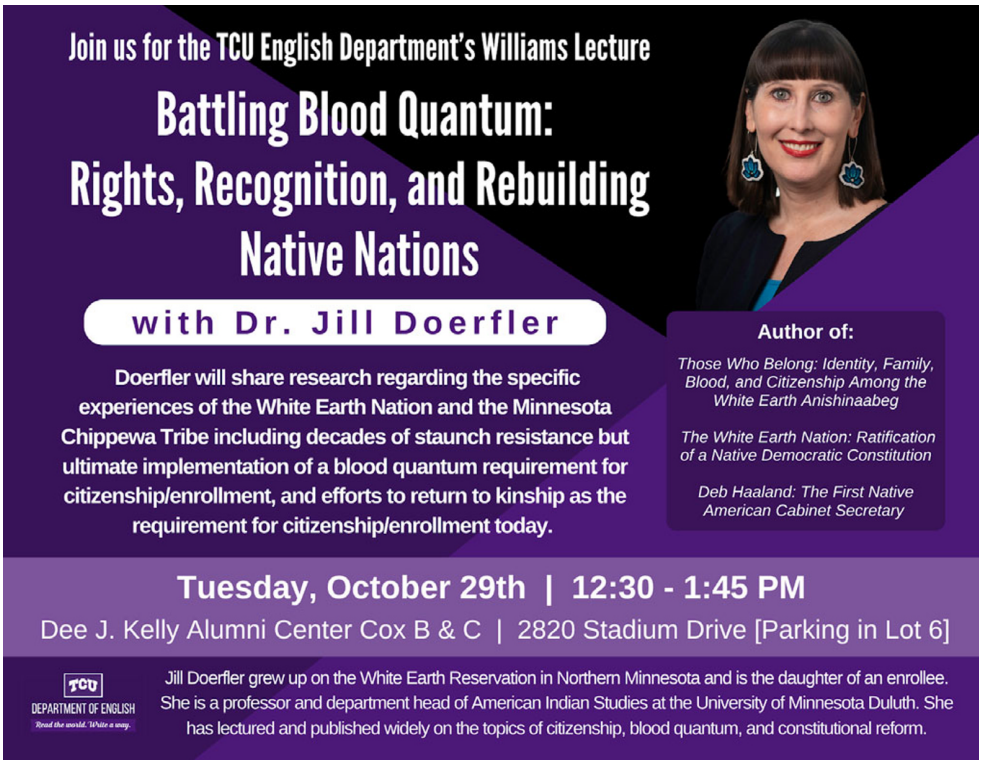

Figure 3. Event flyer for external audiences.
Flyer credit: English Department publicity staff, October 2024.

for external community members. Our efforts bore fruit. Although public events since the COVID-19 era have sometimes drawn disappointing attendance, we welcomed almost 200 attendees to the public lecture—a mix of students, faculty, staff, and both Native and non-Native community members (Figure 4).

Besides the pre-event dinner, luncheon, and public lecture, we built two additional course-linked activities into the day-long program. One entailed having Doerfler meet with Yu's seminar of undergraduate English majors during their class time. Having studied a cluster of texts on Indigenous sovereignty, including several of Doerfler's own publications and Vizenor's *Treaty Shirts*, this group was well prepared for small-group conversation.[25] Later in the day, Doerfler met with several of Robbins' graduate students, whose course that semester was incorporating the study of how to shift voice when writing on scholarly topics for a broad readership. That class had studied Doerfler's recent website essay for a public humanities audience, set alongside, on the one hand, her article series for her local tribal newspaper and, on the other, her scholarly book co-edited with Vizenor.[26] With this group, Doerfler's informal conversation drew both on the graduate students' reading of her publications about sovereignty and on her example of creating public-facing publications for diverse audiences.

[25] Vizenor 2016.
[26] Vizenor and Doerfler 2012.

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Figure 4. Lecture audience with Doerfler.
Photo credit: Glen E. Ellman, photographer, October 29, 2024.

Evaluating our program

Our assessment of the impact of this initiative blended two methods: written surveys of participants and a Zoom reflection session for event facilitators (also this essay's co-authors). To create our surveys, we adapted simplified models of the National [USA] Humanities Alliance's "Document Your Impact" tool kit.[27] We also drew on survey forms co-author Robbins had helped develop as a lead scholar for the assessment of the [USA] National Writing Project's large-scale grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, "Building a More Perfect Union," and for a much smaller-scale public project funded by Humanities Texas to support K-12 educators. We also revisited the MLA Guidelines referenced above to identify the aspects of impact we hoped to track. We circulated one set of surveys by email to Native community members and others who had registered for the luncheon and a separate cluster for each set of students who came with their classes to one or more of the activities.

Nandi and Robbins (two co-authors here) drafted questions for both survey groups (Native community members and students). Other team members submitted revisions for those drafts, which we then finalized. Although the day-long series of activities addressed multiple audiences in varying contexts (class sessions, lunch conversation, and public lecture), all of our evaluation forms sought to assess the impact that this one-day event had on the larger ongoing context for Native curriculum and community-building described above. We also included a context-specific set of questions for each coherent student group that had attended the main lecture as an assigned class activity, since we wanted instructors to be able to evaluate how well the experience had addressed their own course-specific goals.

[27] Hill and McDonald n.d.

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Figure 5. Doerfler with undergraduate seminar students, course instructor Yu, and visiting colleague Ken Roemer (in hat) from the nearby University of Texas at Arlington.
Photo credit: Glen E. Ellman, photographer, October 29, 2024Photo credit: Glen E. Ellman, photographer, October 24, 2024.

(In the Supplementary Material, see examples of two of the four surveys distributed to students in different specific classes interacting with Doerfler.)

We sent a digital survey to everyone who attended the luncheon, including members of local Native communities from outside the campus. (The lunch was the only event requiring pre-registration. Everyone at the lunch also attended the public lecture.) This survey requested open-ended feedback while also asking close-ended questions about the day's activities. (See survey copy in the Supplementary Material.) Perhaps predictably, this digital survey had a low response rate, but many of the comments offered were detailed and insightful, including expressing ways that the event had signaled a commitment to reciprocal work with Native communities.

As noted above, we developed a different, multiversion set of surveys for students in each course group that met with Doerfler separately, attended the public lecture, or both. Like the digital survey, these tailored questionnaires contained both close-ended and open-ended questions. Two of these courses (Razo-Haynes's and Layne Craig's) were lower-division offerings enrolling 30+ students each, with the latter being a general literature course not focused on Native cultures. Our one advanced undergraduate class in the survey pool (Yu's) included seven students enrolled in the research seminar for majors; for Robbins' graduate course, only the half-dozen students who were able to attend an event (all being held outside their normal class time) completed a survey. All surveys reached student audiences through their course instructors, typically during a single class meeting—thereby ensuring a high response rate. Instructors sent their complete survey sets to Robbins and Nandi to review data, both according to each group's responses and as a whole (Figure 5).

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Overall, whatever their course context, student respondents made similar comments and suggestions. One recurring theme was appreciation that a notable number of Native community members attended the lecture and contributed both questions and comments to the open discussion after the formal lecture. Besides expressing interest in the community members' lived experiences, many students also articulated a wish to learn concrete steps for helping support Indigenous sovereignty. Even among members of the one class attending without any prior preparation on the topic (sent by a colleague eager to support the project but not a member of the planning team), multiple student responses attested to the lecture's having provided a new recognition of different cultural and citizenship practices among different Native American nations. The student surveys, conducted in anonymity, never registered a confrontational response or recorded any resistance to the topics Doerfler presented. Instead, a number of students critiqued the U.S. educational system for having left them with knowledge gaps that they now hoped to address more fully in the future.

As noted earlier, students from three of these classes, based on assignments of Doerfler publications and related texts, had prior knowledge that they brought to the lecture. Interestingly, although the fourth group of students did not have similar preparation, their responses nonetheless turned out to be surprisingly insightful, even in a few cases rivaling those from the other classes. For example, one student with prior knowledge about the Canadian government's policies regarding First Nations noted that, unlike the education system in the United States, "Canada's early education is very focused on first nation history." Moreover, the student offered a critique of the U.S. government's using the term "Indian," by pointing out its colonial origins, and remarking that "in Canada we were taught first nation or their tribal names as Indian is a mistake from early Europeans and equal to a slur in this context." Among students who had received prior lessons on the topics covered in Doerfler's lecture, meanwhile, some survey responses added comments on Doerfler's scholarly methodologies. One of these noted with interest how, in her series of articles about blood quantum, Doerfler "discussed utilizing indigenous archives for her work and discussions about indigenous publications in our country." Another extended a similar observation with a question: "I'd like to know more about her theoretical+methodological choices - if she incorporates indigenous theory or if she adapts any Western practices to fit her work."

Complementing our surveys, a second major element for evaluation entailed a conversation by the co-authors reflecting together on the experience of hosting Doerfler. While we value assessment using survey data (e.g., understanding that administrators sometimes translate high attendance numbers into future resources), we were eager to immerse in shared reflection and listening. We see such informal but illuminating strategies as interacting with formal academic models so that, in assessment as well as in program delivery, we can take meaningful steps toward Indigenizing public humanities and other university endeavors.[28]

All of us did read the survey data before this meeting. During our conversation, we took time for team members to share thoughts on all subtopics for this essay and to listen to each other. Thus, brainstorming for this case study report served double duty as an assessment

[28] In striving to value narrative ways of evaluative knowledge-building versus Western-oriented quantitative tools like survey data, we affiliate with Leanne Simpson's creative assertion of Native figure Nanabush as "the first researcher" and a role model for building fluid theory through stories based on observation, reflection, and listening from learning journeys. Simpson 2017, 183–84.

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method and an early step in our writing. Our Zoom meeting also produced a written transcript for Nandi and Robbins to reference as they generated our first draft. Furthermore, by recording the conversation, we created the start of a new interpersonal archive of resources for English Department members' hosting future Williams lectures, which we hope will always be conceived as collaborative public humanities opportunities, even when not focused on Native content.

Major takeaways

As our case study demonstrates, nesting even a one-day event within a larger context of ongoing humanities learning can make a worthwhile contribution to a larger shared agenda. Major strategies that we will continue to cultivate for similar events include selecting topics aligned with long-term interests and commitments held by all community members, choosing time and place options with a high likelihood of serving multiple audiences well, advertising with awareness of different groups' needs, opening up spaces in programming activities for many voices, creating meaningful records and assessments of the work, and generating feedback loops of knowledge sharing to enable future activities to benefit from successes and learn from shortcomings of any single program.

One key takeaway from this project is being encouraged about the progress our university is making in building meaningful connections with regional Native communities, fostering new curriculum in the field, and nurturing the network of faculty, staff, and students who share these commitments. Being able to generate a strong number of attendees for the public lecture through careful planning represents just one sign of our success. Additionally, we celebrate how many different stakeholders came together to plan and execute a multi-event program of activities linked to Doerfler's visit. Developing Native studies visibility and impact at a predominantly white institution far removed geographically from any tribal reservations has not been easy. But this public humanities initiative allowed multiple groups —students, faculty, staff, administration, and Native community members—to see an event embodying progress made.

On an important flip side, reflecting together afterward pinpointed areas of additional work needed. For instance, although our university has taken pride in collaborative writing and dissemination of a land acknowledgment shaped along with tribal groups, our event's presentation of that text fell short. Several thoughtful survey responses and our own self-assessment post-event noted that the land acknowledgment was not clearly linked with the program occasion. The three students who did provide the acknowledgment, though appreciative of being asked, appeared under-prepared. Taking that critique into account, we appreciated another Native faculty member's far more compelling land acknowledgment presentation at another university event later that same month, especially since we had missed a chance for similarly effective public pedagogy at the Doerfler lecture. Similarly, though the planning for our event included a number of Native faculty members and students, the time crunch of managing logistics wound up limiting our time for identifying and directly contacting as many Native leaders and allies from around the region as we would have liked. That said, we received overwhelmingly positive feedback from Native community leaders who did attend, with one group of tribal leaders traveling together from many hours' distance away due to the topic's relevance for their own current work on citizenship. We also noted the confidence numerous Native attendees clearly felt that their comments and questions in the discussion time after Doerfler's formal presentation would be welcome—a sign that our campus has become a space where their expertise and vision are fully embraced. Taking both shortcomings and signs of success around our network

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Figure 6. Doerfler and Native American and Indigenous Liaison Sierra.
Photo credit: Glen E. Ellman, photographer, October 24, 2024.

development efforts into account, this event conveyed, on reflection, indications of both more work to do and progress in fostering "a web of ethical relationships" as central to Indigenous methods of collaboration.[29]

We also fell short in several dimensions of the luncheon event. We were disappointed that numerous students who had registered wound up not attending—a perennial problem at TCU, actually. We think we should have focused more on attracting staff working in areas compatible with Native studies, such as Student Affairs, in addition to faculty and Native community members. We also wish we had sought out and invited potential allies from metro-area organizations who could have networked with Native community members attending.

As we look ahead to more network-building—along with curricular initiatives such as a possible minor and eventual major in Native studies, as well as increased scholarships for Native students—we take encouragement from the enthusiastic student responses to this day-long programming. Extending the important foundation of the fall Sovereignty Symposium for Native American and Indigenous Peoples' Day, our English Department-sponsored visit by Doerfler enhanced the visibility of important humanities work on campus and generated additional energy across the numerous interactive networks involved in our interconnected, longer-term goals. As just one sign of that growth, we note the success of having assembled an entire busload of students, faculty, and staff for a day-long trip to visit the Choctaw Cultural Center at the end of March 2025, as well as the enthusiastic collaborations already envisioning our fall 2025 Symposium theme of Water in/and Native Communities. Overall, despite its shortcomings, our October 2025 day-long cluster of events did contribute to our shared ongoing progress (Figure 6).

The Kanehelat&ksla ends with the speaker acknowledging that they have done the best they are able and asking the listeners to have peace in their minds. This request is not

[29] Simpson 2017, 183.

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merely performative; while there are certainly official versions put out by cultural heritage and language organizations within the various Haudenosaunee nations, it has no doctrinal form. The structure and themes are generally standard, but the order and way in which speakers address the natural world may change from speaker to speaker. Moreover, by closing in this manner, the speaker returns us back to the fallible world of humanity, asking only that we each keep these values in mind and do our best to continue in respect and reciprocity.

T@ n#: on^ th% niyo:l#: na'katlihwatkwe:n$: tsi' n@hte' kahlihway<t@hkw<
N#: <tw#lheke' sk<:n^: <twanuhtuny&heke'
T@: n#: th% nikwa<:n@ke

Let it be as far as I was able to do that has been laid down now.
We will think of peace in our minds.
So let it be these words.

So let it be these words.

Gunja Nandi received top scored in her bachelor's and master's programs in English literature in Kolkata, India, securing a Gold Medal award. As part of her doctoral project at Texas Christian University, she studied twentieth- and twenty-first-century postcolonial Anglophone literatures from ecologically precarious locations in the Global South in conjunction with long-nineteenth-century literatures of Empire to examine how specific colonial structures persist in the afterlives of Empire in the Anthropocene. She has presented at several international conferences, including the Midwest Victorian Studies Association Conference, the British Women Writers' Conference, and the Victorian Popular Fiction Association Conference. Her publications include contributions to *Volupté*, forthcoming edited volumes on ecoprecarity in South Asian literatures from Bloomsbury Academic and Springer Nature, and the digital humanities project "Undisciplining the Victorian Classroom."

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Sarah's professional website (https://sarahruffingrobbins.com/) spotlights blog postings linking her academic study of American culture with commentary on cultural events and social issues.

Supplementary material. The supplementary material for this article can be found at http://doi.org/10.1017/pub.2025.10031.

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